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Proofs and Prints,

ENGRAVINGS AND ETCHINGS;

HOW THEY ARE MADE, THEIR GRADES, QUALITIES AND
VALUES, AND HOW TO SELECT THEM.

BY

C. KLACKNER.

NEW YORK:

1884.







"WILL THEY CONSENT?"
(From an etching by Hamilton Hamilton.)

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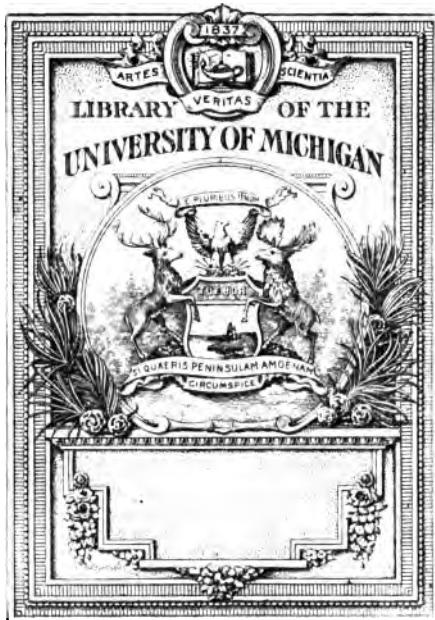
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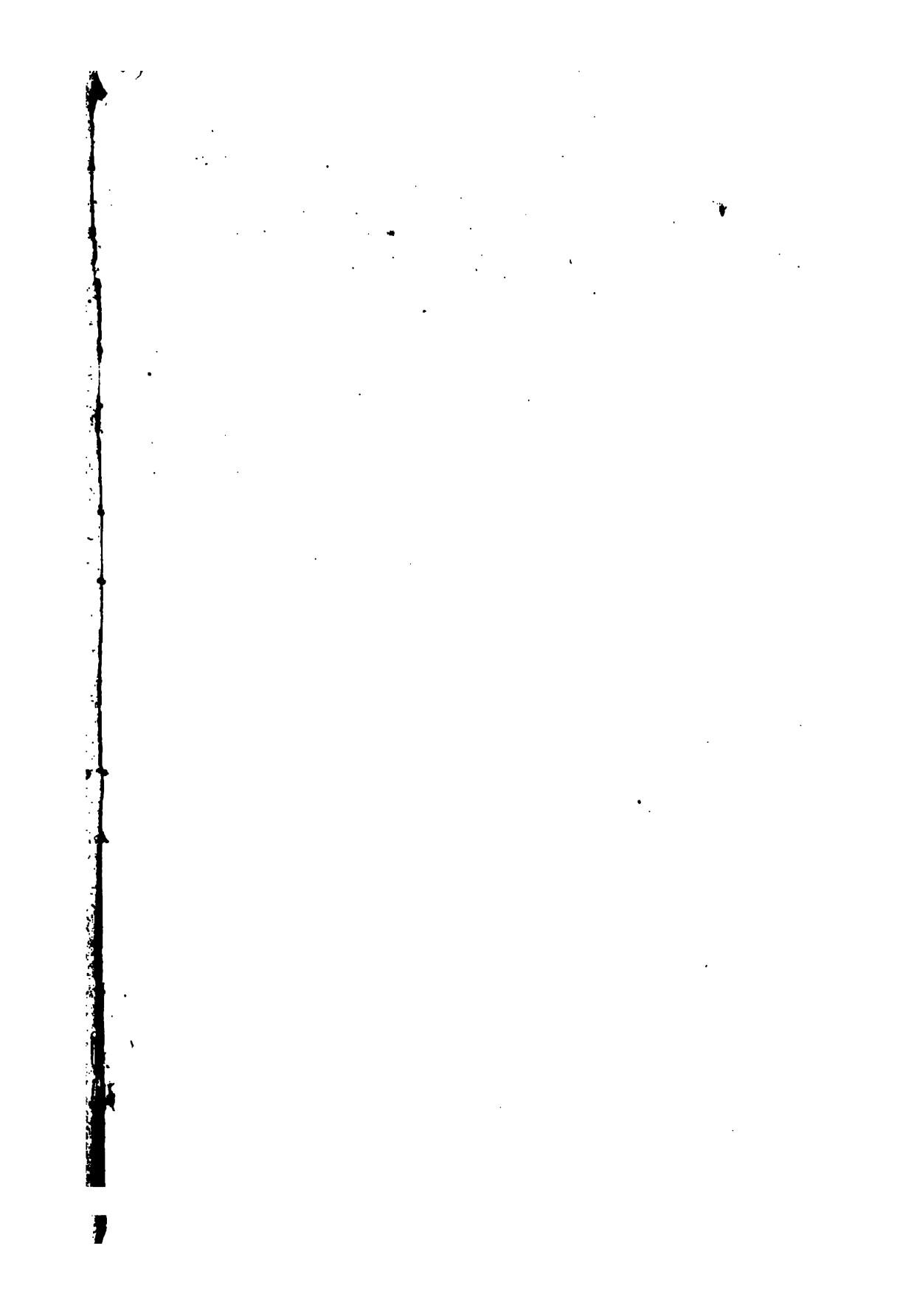
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P R E F A C E.

The growing taste for fine proof engravings and etchings in this country has given rise to a peculiar interest and inquiry into the material features of this line of art. Many, even among the most enthusiastic collectors, admit their lack of practical knowledge, and the demand upon print publishers and the newspapers for information is constant and extensive. In view of this fact, the author gives out this little volume, not as an essay on the art, but as a handy guide to those whose taste or inclination lead them to invest in its products. Its briefly stated facts furnish the information essential to an intelligent investment in engravings or etchings, and will, it is trusted, be found of interest as well as use to every reader. The author has not attempted an elaborate or exhaustive treatment of the subject, but a simple statement of the facts essential to a safe purchase of the works of art with which "Proofs and Prints" deals.

C. K.





Copper is rarely used in line engraving now, as the metal is too soft to last long under the press. Steel plates, whose surfaces are perfectly polished and free from inequalities or scratches, are the pages on which the engraver designs with indelible characters.

Line engraving has justly been called the perfection of the engraver's art. It brings into play all of his executive genius and his artistic feeling, and the perfect line engraving is and ever will be the purest example of the alliance of artistic with mechanical skill.

II.
PRINTING.

The printing of a line engraving is an operation of the highest importance. According as a plate is well or badly printed the value of the engraving is brought out or lost. The operation of printing is in itself simple enough. It is the intelligence with which it must be performed which renders it one of the skilled trades.

The plate to be printed is heated to a moderate temperature on a stone slab under which a flame of gas is kept burning. This is necessary to permit the ink to flow and enter the depths of the lines. The ink is thick and oleaginous, and is daubed over the plate until the lines are all filled. The surface of the plate is then wiped with a cloth and polished with the palm of the printer's hand. This cleans the surface perfectly, without disturbing the ink in the lines. A poor printer will, however, rub the ink in the delicate lines out, too, and produce a broken or rotten impression, giving only the coarse work, and thus destroying all the harmony and gradation of the engraving.

The plate, still warm, is placed upon a press; the paper, which is damp, is laid upon it, and it is rolled under a roller padded out with blankets, whose pressure forces the paper into the lines till it takes up the ink which fills them. A tremendous power is required for this, and the variation of a spider's web in the regulation of the pressure will render the impression defective. If a plate is allowed to cool before it is put under the press the ink also will harden in the lines and the paper will not take it up. The dampening of the paper is necessary to keep it from adhering to the plate.

The paper used in ordinary plate-printing is a fine, white paper, manufactured especially for the purpose. It varies in thickness according to the size of the plate. Proofs are printed on India paper, for which no substitute for the finest printing has yet been discovered. India paper is a production of the East, as its name implies. Its substance is vegetable fibre and it possesses an amazing tenacity, delicate richness of color and beauty of surface. India paper of the best quality is difficult to procure and very costly.

In taking India proofs, the India paper, cut to the proper proportion, is carefully laid upon the plate, a sheet of ordinary plate paper is laid over it and it is run through the press. The glutinous quality of the India paper and the pressure cause it to adhere to the plate paper and it comes out mounted and ready for use. Remark and Artist proofs require so much care in printing that only a few impressions can be made in a day, but all grades of plate impressions are the product of time and care, which increases in proportion to the quality required.

III.

REMARK PROOFS.

There are several grades of proofs, each of which has a special name and value. The Remark (from the French "Remarque") proof is the choicest and most valuable. The Remark is a special sketch or emblem engraved, at the engraver's fancy, upon the margin of the plate, as thus :



Remarks are not always attached to engravings; usually only to the most costly and important plates. There are at times as many as 100 impressions taken of the Remark plate, but 50 is the customary limit. The Remark proofs are the first impressions taken. They are printed with the utmost

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care, and develop all the value of the engraving, every copy which exhibits an imperfection, even in a line, being destroyed.

IV.

ARTIST'S PROOFS.

After the Remark proofs are made, the Remark is polished off of the plate and the Artist's proofs are taken. These usually number 200. Like the Remark proofs, they are executed with the most painstaking care; but they, of course, lack the value of the mark which stamps the first impressions of an engraving as cherished rarities. The Artist's proof is distinguished by the name of the painter and the engraver or etcher, as thus :

J. G. Brown. *James Scott.*

When the name of either the one or the other is omitted, as may be in case of the death of artist or engraver, the value of the proof is not impaired. Any signed proof, with one or two names, is an Artist's proof. If no Remark proofs exist they are the first impressions taken, otherwise the second.

V.

PROOFS BEFORE LETTERS.

The proofs before letters are printed immediately after the Artist's proofs. They usually consist of 100 copies. They are never signed by artist or engraver, but have their names engraved on the right and left hand corners of the plate respectively, in small letters. They also have the publisher's mark and address on the bottom, in this way:

T. W. Wood, pinxit. *C. Klackner, pub.* *F. Girsch, eng.*

VI.

INDIA PRINTS.

India prints are the most desirable, after the Artist's proofs and proofs before letters. They have the title engraved upon them as well as the artist's and engraver's names and the publisher's marks. The edition is not limited in number. Their superiority to ordinary prints is due to the superior



quality of the impression produced by the India paper, while they lack the choiceness and consequent rarity of the preceding grades.

VII.

PLAIN PRINTS.

Plain prints are impressions on linen paper. They have all the marks and letters of India prints, and are printed with equal care. The paper, however, renders them of less value than the India impressions, because the quality of the latter paper enhances the beauty while it increases the cost of the proof.

VIII.

THE VALUE OF PROOFS.

The value of a proof is regulated by the cost of engraving a plate and by the number of proofs issued. It can be readily understood that engravings from a plate which cost \$5,000, and of which only 100 proofs were taken, cannot be sold at the price of a plate which cost \$2,500. If the edition from the \$5,000 plate is unlimited, however, while that of the \$2,500 is restricted to 100, the latter may be more valuable, not because of its quality, but its rarity. Quality and quantity thus go hand in hand and are dependent upon one another.

The size of a plate has little to do in regulating the price of proofs. An engraver may, as in the case of the "Madonna di San Sisto," on which Mandel worked more than ten years, devote a good part of a lifetime to a plate, while one four times the size may be completed in a year. The quality of a plate, which is dependent on the time devoted to it, is the first test of its value.

To insure choice impressions it is always desirable to obtain the first grade, be it Remark or Artist's proof. The rapid sale of Artist proofs in this country and Europe exhausts the limited number printed in a very short time. The entire edition is frequently sold immediately after publication. Publishers in most cases reserve the right to advance the price, so that in numerous instances early purchasers can obtain a handsome advance on the first cost very shortly after purchasing. "L'Angelus," by Millet, published at \$187, has advanced to \$350, and

is difficult to purchase at that price; "The Jersey," painted by Douglas, and published at \$30, has risen as high as \$175; Artist proofs of the engraving of "Far Away," after J. G. Brown, by F. Girsch, recently published at \$30, has already risen to \$65; "Inspiration," by S. J. Ferris, has reached \$75 from \$30, and "The Vesper Hour," a fine etching by King, scarcely three months old, has advanced from \$30 to \$45. Another example is in the beautiful etchings by A. F. Bellows, "The Inlet" and "The Millstream," which were published at \$18 and now bring \$45.

Such examples could be multiplied to apply to hundreds of engravings. They will, however, serve to show that while the best and most perfect impressions are the most expensive, they are worth their cost, for one may enjoy their use for years while they are all the time earning interest on themselves.

IX.

COPYRIGHTED PICTURES.

The popularity and value of original American engravings are to a great extent enhanced by the absence of an international copyright law. This leaves the finest foreign works open to cheap reproduction, which must to a certain extent impair the value of the legitimate impressions. An illustration is shown in the frequent and barefaced appropriation of the most costly foreign engravings for the commonest sorts of advertising here. The numerous mechanical processes of reproduction render this piracy the more easy and common.

American plates, protected by copyright, are, however, safe. Their value is certain to be preserved, if not to advance with time, secure from any of the aggressions to which every unprotected work is open.

ETCHINGS.

I.

ETCHING.

The art of etching is as distinct from that of engraving as its results are, though certain of the methods of engraving are employed. Its process may be briefly described as follows:

A polished copper plate is covered with a ground of varnish prepared for the purpose, and upon it the design is drawn, line for line, as it is intended to appear on paper, with a sharp needle, which scratches through the varnish to the plate and leaves the metal bare. It is exactly like making a pen drawing, save that a needle is employed instead of a pen. When the design is completed the surface of the plate is flooded with aquafortis. This attacks the spots laid bare by the needle, without penetrating where the varnish is untouched, and bites into the copper. When the finer lines are deep enough the acid is poured off, and they are covered or stopped out with varnish. The acid is applied again and again in this way, biting the lines to the depth required, the heaviest and strongest lines naturally receiving the most biting. The etcher's eye and his knowledge are his only guides in this process, and a miscalculation in the strength of the acid or the time it is permitted to remain on the plate often ruins a fine work.

After being bitten in, etchings usually receive some finish with the dry point. This is a needle which is used to scratch supplementary lines upon the plate, strengthening parts which are not bitten deep enough. Some etchings are made almost entirely with the dry point, like those of James Tissot. Their effect is wonderfully powerful and rich. In simple etching the effect is produced by a line in the plate, but in dry point it

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